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ABSTRACT

Recent data show that while attrition is a problem for the college population as a whole, it is particularly so for minority students attending predominantly white colleges and universities. In addition to financial and academic difficulties, minority students are faced with such concerns as the low number of minority faculty and student support services staff; the dearth of cultural and social programs geared to minority students; an often unfamiliar and unsupportive campus environment; and an attitude of indifference or hostility of many administrators and faculty that make it extremely difficult for even the better prepared minority student to succeed. The data driven retention model described uses computerized monitoring and campus-wide committees to improve the recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of minority students generally, and particularly those in under-represented disciplines. (Author/JEL)

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A DATA DRIVEN MINORITY STUDENT RETENTION MODEL FOR FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

Andrew Goodrich

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"A Data Driven Minority Student Retention Model for Faculty and Administrators in Predominantly White Institutions"

Background

In the early 1970's the decline in college enrollment through the United States forcused the attention of both administrators and educators on student retention. Although the specific purpose of this paper is to recommend new strategies in the use of data in monitoring enrollment distribution, retention, and graduation rates of minority students in predominantly white colleges, a review of the scholarly research in probably the most critical area, retention, is presented to provide an overview of the breadth and depth of this educational problem. A survey of the current literature thus shows that there are three significant questions: 1) Who drops out of college? 2) Why do they drop out? and 3) How can the overall dropout rate be reduced?

Addressing the "who" and "why" of student dropout, Astin (1975) notes that considerable confusion surrounds these issues because the term "dropout" has not been clearly defined. Frequently, students classified as dropouts return to complete their degrees either at a later date or at another institution. Astin suggests that a more accurate system of classifying exiting students would considerably change the statistical picture of the dropout problem. A similar study by El-Khawas and Bisconti (1974) shows that while the attrition rate of a full-time

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freshman class was 43.1% after five years, it was only 23.2% after ten years. Clearly, then, who the dropouts are is intrinsically related to how the individual researcher defines "dropout."

As an alternative to the simplistic "who" and "why" responses of earlier research, Sigler (1976) suggests an "interactive approach" to identifying potential dropouts. Rather than placing primary emphasis on the academic preparation of the individual student, Sigler indicates that such factors as family background, choice of college, college living environment, and campus friendships and support services interact with the student's personality to produce a successful student or a dropout. In another significant study, Schulman (1976) proposes that the degree of "fit" or "congruence" between the student and the profile of the college is the critical factor in retention. That is, if the student "fits" academically, socially, and motivationally into the environment of the college he attends, he is less likely to drop out, stop out, or transfer. This finding parallels the earlier Newcomb and Flack study (1964) which showed that students whose behavior did not conform to campus social norms were highly prone to drop out. On the other hand, such factors as parental expectations concerning college achievement (Hackman and Dysinger, 1970) and parental advice, praise, and interest in the college experience (Trent and Ruyle, 1965) have been found to reduce the chances of a student's dropping out.

Research concerned with preventing rather than explaining college student attrition has been concentrated in four major areas: 1) providing the high-risk student with extended and personalized counseling from faculty members (Drake University, 1975) or specially trained graduate students (Koloc, 1976); 2) supporting the development

by exit-prone students of friendships and contacts with "significant others" on campus through small interest groups, special club activities, and student admission teams (Spring Arbor College, 1974); 3) mandatory counseling and study skills programs for students who are failing at the end of their freshman year (Kay, 1972); and 4) experimental teaching programs such as the Thirteen-College Curriculum Program (1972) which separates dropout-prone students from the main academic stream and employs a totally separate program of study that emphasizes non-verbal rather than traditional academic abilities. Each of these prevention programs has experienced some success in reducing the dropout rate among incoming freshmen and sophomores. However, despite access to the ideas and materials in programs such as those mentioned above, the dropout rate at four-year colleges and universities is still high.

While attrition is a problem for the college student population as a whole, it is particularly so for minority students attending predominantly white universities. In addition to financial and academic difficulties which typically contribute to student attrition, the minority student faces an unfamiliar and frequently unsupportive environment. The low percentage of minority faculty and student support services staff, the dearth of cultural and social programs geared to minority students, and the indifference or hostility of many administrators and faculty make it extremely difficult for even the better prepared minority student to adapt to the college environment.

Enrollment

A recently released position paper by the Southern Regional Education Board (June, 1976) on "The Improvement of Retention Opportunities for Minority Students on Majority Campuses" notes that:

> Although higher education has come to serve a much wider spectrum of students from varying cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, efforts to recruit and educate increasing numbers of Black and other minorities have been unsystematic and inadequate. Moreover, a recent nationwide survey has indicated a general decline in the enrollment of minority students from an earlier peak of 14.8 percent to 13.0. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (February 11, 1974, Vol. VIII, No. 19) such enrollment decreases have not been limited to any specific level, but have been spread across the entire spectrum of higher education. For example, in two-year colleges, enrollment among minorities was down from 17.7 percent to 15.7 percent; in four-year colleges, it dropped from 16.7 percent to 13.9 percent; and in universities, the enrollment decreased from 7.2 percent to 6.5 percent. One of the highest decreases reported was in the public four-year colleges, down from 20.5 percent in 1972 to 14.4 percent in 1973. More specifically, the percentage of Blacks enrolled as freshmen dropped from a peak of 8.7 to 7.8 percent between the fall of 1972 and 1973. National data also show a significant differential between the retention of minority students and the non-minority student population. A case in point is that at one of the universities in the Southeastern region, 14 percent of the Black enrollment was dismissed for academic reasons as compared to 3 percent for white students and 4 percent for the university as a whole. (Andrew Goodrich, A Report on the Academic Status of Minority Students, College Park, Maryland, December 1975)

These results imply a declining enrollment and much higher attrition rate for blacks than for whites. Yet, in the face of this problem, local predominantly white institutions have seldom responded with studies to determine the causes of this problem. A report by Egerton (1975) on persistence and graduation rates reveals the following:

> Of every 100 white 18 year olds in the United States, about 75 finish high school, about 45 enter college, and about 15 earn a baccalaureate degree; of every 100 black 18 years olds, about 65 finish high school, approximately 30 enter college, and only about 5 earn a degree (pp. 4-5, Equality of Access in Postsecondary Education, Report of Conference sponsored by Southern Education Foundation, July 17-19, 1975).

Such statistics show that even when students feel they have the ability to succeed in college, and when colleges agree by admitting them, minority students in particular find that institutions have not been responsive enough to create an environment which will eventually lead to college graduation. Even though black enrollment at traditionally white schools and white enrollment at formerly all-black institutions are higher than they were ten years ago, many problems associated with this integration have not yet been solved. Considering that only 5 out of 30 entering black students graduate from college, there is a definite need for Black administrators and faculty at predominantly white institutions to give serious attention to the use of data as an advisory tool for: (1) assisting students and parents in making career choices; (2) helping university administrators identify problem areas regarding enrollment distribution; and (3) assist university decisionmakers in pinpointing areas in need of supplementary academic support services, such as math and the physical sciences.

The Quality of Minority Student Enrollment: A National Overview*

A recent study by William Boyd has shown that Black undergraduate students tend to enroll more heavily in education and the social and behavioral sciences, and lean away from such professional fields as architecture, engineering, pre-medicine, and the physical sciences. This accounts largely for the lack of Black professionals in these areas. Boyd's study shows that:

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*Quality is defined as the distribution of minority student enrollment across and between academic disciplines, with a special focus on those areas where historically, there has been serious underrepresentation--i.e., engineering, architecture, physical sciences, pre-professional areas.

> whereas 28% of black students are enrolled in the social sciences, 15% in education, and 15% in business, only 6% are enrolled in biological sciences, 4% in engineering and math, and 2% in physical sciences.

Similarly, a study by the National Research Council of 1974 doctoral recipients shows that:

> over half (59.2%) of the Ph.D.'s awarded to blacks were in education, whereas only 25% of the total number of U.S. citizens awarded doctorates received them in education. Further, 12.5% of blacks received their doctorates in the social sciences, 8.9% in the arts and humanities and 8.2% in the life sciences; yet only 1.9% of black Ph.D. recipients received their degrees in engineering and 5.4% in the physical sciences. (Of the total number of U.S. citizens receiving Ph.D.'s, however, 6.7% received them in engineering and 13.6% in the physical sciences.)

Recommended Strategies

In view of the preceding data, the need for the employment of fresh initiatives and new strategies for the use of data and information in monitoring minority enrollment, retention, and graduation rates is obvious. Utilizing a campus-wide retention-model for monitoring minority student progress in the above areas, the following approach is designed to accommodate predominantly white campuses with overall enrollments that range from fifteen to thirty-five (or plus) thousand students.

Specifically, four ideas are presented to assist in the above areas: 1) a campus-wide retention and monitoring program; 2) a computerized academic monitoring system; 3) a format for depicting a comprehensive and comparative profile on the academic status of minority students identified as majors within specific

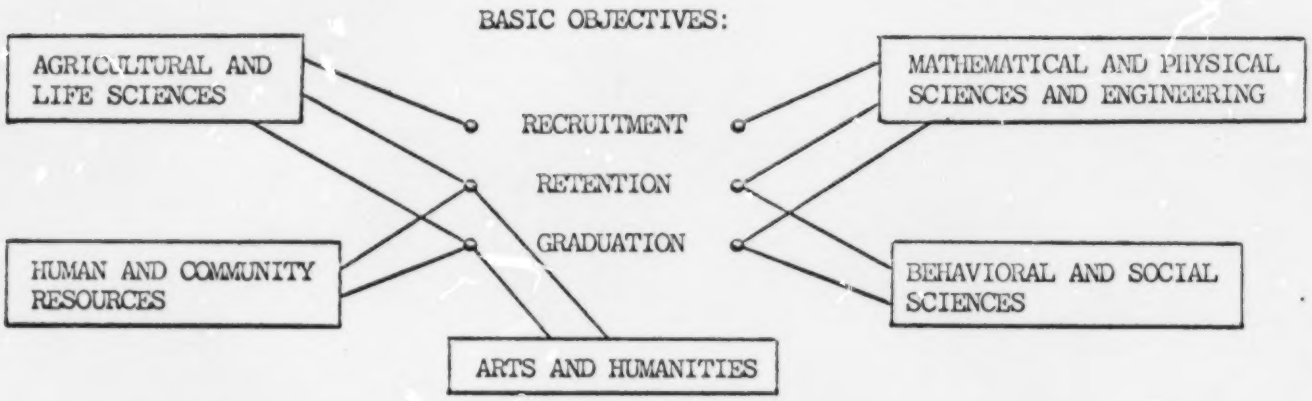
divisions and departments; and 4) a long-range program designed to identify major causal factors associated with academic and student personnel related problems, and implement corrective strategies.

Academic Articulation: A Campus-Wide Retention and Monitoring Program

The University of Maryland at College Park is a campus of over 35,000 students. More than 2,400 of these students are Black with an additional 1,000 or so of American Indian, Spanish-speaking, and Asian American descent. As part of the university's effort to monitor and improve the retention status of minority students, an Academic Articulation Program (Goodrich, 1975) was developed and implemented during the fall of 1973. Its central purpose is to support the university's recruitment and retention goals for minority students. The Academic Articulation Program utilizes divisional committees to monitor resources, identify curriculum needs, review recruitment and retention data, admissions policies, and advisement services within the divisions, all with a view toward the final goal, graduation. Each Academic Articulation Committee is chaired by a faculty member or administrator appointed by the division provost.

Under this program, the Office of Minority Student Education (OMSE) periodically forwards enrollment and retention data to each division provost and committee chairperson highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of various departments and programs as these strengths and weaknesses relate to the areas of enrollment, probation, good standing, and academic dismissal. An overview of the Academic Articulation model and its components is provided below:

ACADEMIC ARTICULATION PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



Among the first tasks of the respective Academic Articulation Committees is that of identifying such DIVISIONAL AND DEPARTMENTAL RESOURCES as:

- TUTORIAL SERVICES
- ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT PROGRAM
- CAREER ADVISEMENT
- STUDENT AID IN THE FORM OF SCHOLARSHIPS, GRANTS, AND INTERNSHIPS
- SPECIAL CURRICULA ARRANGEMENTS/ BILINGUAL PROGRAMS, COURSES; INTERDISCIPLINARY ARRANGEMENTS, ETC.

Computerized Academic Monitoring System

Another important aspect of the divisional articulation program that is proving to be a major force in the retention effort is the early identification of minority and majority students with academic problems in a select number of courses. To this end, OMSE has coordinated a computerized academic monitoring system which identifies students with

a "D" or "F" into the fifth week of an academic semester. At this stage, OMSE uses a cross section of 34 courses which are traditionally considered "difficult." University computers crossfile the students with difficulties to individual instructors, divisional advisors, and to OMSE. Letters are then sent to the students concerned, directing them to available services such as advisors, tutors, counselors, and departmental aid. While no procedures for evaluating the program have been finalized, the response to this effort so far has been quite good.

This system provides for:

- The INSTRUCTOR'S IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS HAVING "D" OR "F" AT END OF FIFTH WEEK OF SEMESTER (SIXTEEN WEEK SEMESTER) IN 34 PROBLEM COURSES (MATH, PHYSICS, CHEMISTRY, ETC.)

- A FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO BE SENT TO STUDENT BY DIVISION AND OMSE INCLUDING A LIST OF TUTORIAL AND ADVISEMENT SOURCES WITH NAMES, SCHEDULES, AND OFFICE LOCATIONS

- FOLLOW-UP/EVALUATION

Division/Departmental Profile

The division and departmental profile format is designed to highlight significant differentials between the retention of minority students and members of the non-minority student population. In addition to enrollment, data is included on good standing, probation, and academic dismissal rates for both minority and non-minority students.

The following division/departmental summary provides an overview of the format used in recording and reporting these data:

DIVISION SUMMARY

	WHITE	BLACK	ORIENTAL	SPANISH AM.	AM. INDIAN	UNKNOWN	TOTAL
Enrollment	2614 (78.9%)	115 (3.5%)	57 (1.7%)	32 (0.96%)	31 (0.9%)	463 (14%)	3312
Good Standing	2258 (86.4%)	78 (67.8%)	52 (91.2%)	26 (81.30%)	25 (80.6%)		
Dismissal	105 (4.1%)	15 (13.0%)	3 (5.3%)	1 (3.10%)	2 (6.4%)	11	138
Probation	240 (9.2%)	21 (18.3%)	1 (1.8%)	5 (15.60%)	4 (12.9%)	80	351

SOURCE: OMSE Report on Academic Status of Minority Students at UMCP, December 19, 1975

Minority Student Retention Workshop

As indicated at the outset, a number of factors impact on the retention or loss of minority students on predominantly white campuses. According to Lee Noel (July, 1976) of The American College Testing Program (ACT), among these factors are isolation (loneliness, depression), academic boredom, dissonance/incompatibility, and irrelevance. Other factors listed by Noel that affect student persistence include the availability of academic advising, affiliation with a Greek organization, holding a part-time job, contact with a faculty member who cares, and a caring or responsive campus environment. In response to the problem of minority student attrition at Maryland, the Office of Minority Student Education has developed and implemented a retention workshop model that focuses on the academically related reasons that impact negatively on minority student persistence. The workshop was designed to build on the existing academic articulation program, as well as launch a fresh campus-wide initiative around the specific concern of minority student retention.

A recent report by the Office of Minority Student Education (OMSE) was used to highlight the problem by providing a comprehensive profile regarding the academic status of minority students for each academic unit. This report showed that during 1974-75, the academic dismissal rate for Black students was 14%, while that for white students was 3%. As the reasons for these dismissals were solely academic, it was decided early that the workshop would seek the heavy involvement of faculty and administrators from the academic divisions.

The workshop model called for:

1) the establishment of seven teams--one from each of the five academic divisions; one composed of leaders or representatives from minority student organizations; and a campus-wide team composed of representatives from admissions and registrations, academic affairs, undergraduate studies, the undergraduate advisement center, student aid, etc.

2) minority student representation on both the division and campus-wide teams.

3) a workshop planning committee composed of persons selected to provide leadership for each of the teams.

4) team membership of 20-30 faculty, administrators, and students.

5) a workshop schedule of specific activities over a period of one and a half days that included a major presentation on the national picture of retention; a mixed panel (race/sex) of faculty and students that addressed their respective perceptions of factors that impact on minority student retention at College Park; opportunity for teams to meet and identify major areas of concern

and need within their units, i.e. the need for more and better academic advisement, expanded tutorial services in critical or required courses, new programs and/or courses designed to assist students experiencing difficulty; and a final general session in which team leaders would report the results of their team effort to meet the workshop expectations.

Each team was asked to explore and identify ways by which their unit could, in an intellectually honest manner, assist in improving the retention of minority student at UMCP. More specifically, they were asked to:

1) identify four or five major academically related problems in your division/unit that have a negative influence on the retention of minority students;
2) outline a proposed set of solutions (including a list of the necessary resources) for resolving these problems;
3) identify faculty or administrative personnel that will assume responsibility for implementing the proposed solutions;
4) propose a specific time-frame, i.e. a specific date or series of dates during this semester that your team will use to evaluate the progress made toward resolving these problems;
5) submit a list of factors or activities that have a positive influence on the retention of minority students within your division, department, etc.

Team leaders were requested to document the information outlined in the above categories and submit one copy to the division provost, and one to the Office of Minority Student Education. In order to provide some feedback to workshop participants regarding the status of this effort, two four-hour follow-up sessions are proposed for the spring semester. During this time, individual teams will be reconvened for assessing the progress made in each of the problem areas identified. Each session will culminate with a general body meeting at which time we will share with workshop participants, the progress made by individual teams.

Finally, a similar workshop that will focus on the campus environment as it relates to student personnel and service oriented units is being planned for the spring semester. Ultimately, team leaders and retention teams from both the academic and student personnel workshops will be brought together for developing long-range plans for closer articulation. Through the use of this model, and with consistent monitoring and follow-ups, it is expected that the retention of minority students at this campus will be considerably enhanced.

Summary

Recent data show that while attrition is a problem for the college population as a whole, it is particularly so for minority students attending predominantly white colleges and universities. The reasons are many and range from academic, financial, and personal, to college environment. And though a great deal of national research (Astin) has focused on the problem of retention within the overall

college-going student population, very little has been done at the local campus level to isolate the special problem of minority student retention at predominantly white institutions.

In addition to financial and academic difficulties, minority students are faced with such concerns as the low number of minority faculty and student support services staff; the dearth of cultural and social programs geared to minority students; an often unfamiliar and unsupportive campus environment; and an attitude of indifference or hostility of many administrators and faculty that make it extremely difficult for even the better prepared minority student to succeed.

In calling for new strategies in the use of data for monitoring the enrollment, retention, and academic status of minority students in predominantly white institutions, a number of areas have been given priority. The following list of recommendations is provided as a guide for administrators who wish to address, in a comprehensive manner, the problem of minority student retention within their institution:

1) Establish a system for determining enrollment, probation, good standing, and academic dismissal rates for each academic unit, i.e. division, department, etc.

2) Develop a system for the early identification of students experiencing academic difficulty (D or F) during the first five or six weeks of each semester.

3) Establish a follow-up communication system for contacting students who experience academic difficulty and those on academic probation.

4) Develop a central comprehensive and sensitive exit monitoring system for acquiring information on the non-academically related reasons students leave your institution

5) Establish campus-wide academic articulation committees for the development of strategies aimed at enhancing either the recruitment, retention, or graduation rates for their respective academic units. The emphasis or focus of the committees should be determined by needs, as dictated by available data for the above categories.

6) Using the academic articulation model, conduct a campus-wide minority retention workshop that focuses on concerns identified by the articulation committees.

The preceding recommendations are not intended to completely resolve the problem of minority student retention at predominantly white colleges, however, if they are pursued with good organization and strong committment, they should go a long way toward improving the retention and graduation rates of minority students at your institution.

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